

# Victorian Studies Association of Ontario



## September 2012

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### The President's Message

The new academic year is now well underway, and I am happy to say that the VSAO has an exciting slate of upcoming events to announce. The association's evening lectures will resume on November the 8th with simultaneous events in Ottawa and Toronto: in Ottawa, Keith Wilson will give a talk rescheduled from last year, "Thomas Hardy as Correspondent: Volume Eight of the *Collected Letters*" (Thursday, 8 November, at 7:30 pm in the ICSLAC Seminar Room, 201B St Patrick's Building, Carleton University), and in Toronto, Tina Choi will speak on "Journeys Through Space and Time: Geography and Narrative in Victorian Railway Guides" (Thursday, 8 November, at 7:30 pm in the Bahen Centre, University of Toronto, 40 St. George Street). In the winter, Mark Knight will give a lecture on 24 January, titled "Proclaiming Go(o)d Words: Religion and the Novel in a Mid-Victorian Periodical" (7:30 Thursday, 24 January 2013 University of Toronto—room to be announced). I am very grateful to all three of the speakers for agreeing to present their work, and to Barbara Leckie in Ottawa and David Latham in Toronto for arranging these events.

Looking further ahead, plans are well in train for the spring conference, to be held Saturday, 27 April 2013. We will once again be using the lovely venue at Glendon College. I am delighted to announce that two outstanding Victorianists have agreed to give plenary addresses—they are Professor Dennis Denisoff, of Ryerson University, and Professor Carolyn Williams, of Rutgers. The conference theme will be "Victorian Play(s): Excess and Expression." A formal call for papers to be presented in the morning panel appears elsewhere

in this newsletter. I hope that many of you will consider submitting a proposal, and that all members of the VSAO will plan to attend what seems certain to be a wonderful event.

Finally, and looking even further ahead, the VSAO is continuing the practice of organizing a session at the annual Congress, to be held next June in Victoria. The call for papers can be found elsewhere in the Newsletter; the topic of next year's session will be "'We Are Not Amused': Victorian Comedy and Humour," and I encourage all members to consider submitting a proposal. The session is being organized by executive members-at-large Letitia Henville and Beth Martin—my thanks to both of them for their work on it.

With best wishes to you all for 2012-13

Matthew Rowlinson  
Department of English and Centre for Theory and Criticism,  
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### **Evening Lectures 2012-2013**

1. Thursday, 8 November 2012, 7:30 pm  
University of Toronto, Bahen Centre, 40 St. George Street:  
**Tina Choi** (York University),  
"Journeys Through Space and Time: Geography and Narrative in Victorian Railway Guides."
2. Thursday, 8 November 2012, 7:30 pm  
Carleton University, ICSLAC Seminar Room, 201B St Patrick's:  
**Keith Wilson** (University of Ottawa),  
"Thomas Hardy as Correspondent: Volume Eight of the Collected Letters."
3. Thursday, 24 January 2013, 7:30 pm,  
University of Toronto (room to be announced):  
**Mark Knight** (University of Toronto),  
"Proclaiming Go(o)d Words: Religion and the Novel in a Mid-Victorian Periodical."

### **Two Calls for Papers**

- for the VSAO annual Spring conference in April (due 28 January 2013)
- and for the annual Congress conference in June (due 28 November 2012)

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### **CFP: 46th Annual VSAO Conference, 27 April 2013, York University**

The VSAO executive invites proposals for 20-minute papers to be presented at next spring's annual conference on 27 April 2013. The conference theme will be "Victorian Play(s): Excess and Expression." Victorian acting, playacting, acting out; posing, positing, and

performing; divinity and fabulousness: considerations of any aspect of Victorian life or culture connected to the theme are welcome. Please send electronic copies of proposals (300-500 words) and a brief biographical statement to Matthew Rowlinson by 30 January 2013.

**CFP: VSAO/ACCUTE Joint Panel , Annual Congress for the Humanities and Social Sciences, 1 June – 8 June 2013, University of Victoria**

The Congress is in Victoria, British Columbia, next year at the University of Victoria, between June 1 and 8. The VSAO looks forward to welcoming Victorianists from across Canada. The call is out for papers for the 2013 VSAO/ACCUTE panel, “We Are Not Amused’: Victorian Comedy and Humour.” Interested scholars are invited to respond to the CFP, with the deadline extended to 28 November. All submissions must include a 700-word proposal, a 100-word abstract, a 50-word biography, and the submitter information form to [VSAOatACCUTE@gmail.com](mailto:VSAOatACCUTE@gmail.com) by 28 November 2012.

**“We Are Not Amused”: Victorian Comedy and Humour**



Though Oscar Wilde's seminal play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, satirizes the high-minded seriousness that was allegedly the defining characteristic of the Victorian age, artefacts such as Max Beerbohm's caricature point to the period's often deliberately concealed history of mirth and irreverence. Of Arnold himself, Beerbohm wrote that "it is because M.A. was so genuinely solemn (and even desperate) at heart that we love his outbursts of fun so much." Comedy is under-explored in Victorian literary criticism, but it is pervasive in the texts of the era, from brief moments — Dickens's caricatures and

Thackeray's asides — to more extended treatments, in Lear's nonsense verse and Jerome K. Jerome's popular *Three Men in a Boat*. This panel invites papers that explore comedy, humour, and laughter in Victorian literature and cultural productions. What functions did comedy and humour serve in Victorian texts? When is its humour riotous and anarchic, and when does it reinforce norms? How comfortably did comedy sit alongside the period's idealization of moral and artistic solemnity? What effect does laughing at, or laughing with, texts and characters have upon our understanding of them? Why are the comic features of a scene or moment important? Papers may consider such topics as:

- Parody, burlesque, farce, and satire
- Ditties, jokes, word-play, wit, and puns
- Laughter and the carnivalesque
- Black humour and the grotesque
- Clowning, the circus, and comic performance
- Gags and practical jokes
- Failed humour or humourlessness
- Comic theatre and the music hall
- Caricatures and stereotypes
- Comedy as social critique or subversive force
- Sentimental humour
- Nonsense verse and light verse
- *Punch* and the cartoon
- "Serious cheerfulness" and the mixing of wit and gravity
- Savoy Operas, Gilbert and Sullivan
- The science and philosophy of Victorian laughter
- *Eminent Victorians* and depictions of Victorian earnestness

### **New Titles by VSAO Members**

We inaugurate a new section highlighting recent publications by our members in the hopes of increasing awareness of the splendid scholarly works that are being produced. Calls will be made to the membership to request further items for each Newsletter. Here are our first two books submitted:

[\*Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime\* by Ann C. Colley](#). Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010.

[\*Medicine and Sanitary Science\*. Ed. Tina Young Choi](#). London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012. Volume 1 of *Sanitary Reform in Victorian Britain*. Gen. Ed. Michelle Allen-Emerson. 6 vols. 2012.